Enclosed is my new renewal membership in the Hyde Park Historical Society.

Student $15  Individual $30  Family $40

Time for you to join up or renew?

Pick out the form below and return it to:

The Hyde Park Historical Society

5529 S. Lake Park Avenue  •  Chicago, IL 60637

Name ________________________________
Address ________________________________
Zip __________  Phone __________
Email ____________________________  Cell __________

Hyde Park Historical Society

COLLECTING AND PRESERVING HYDE PARK'S HISTORY

Published by the Hyde Park Historical Society

SUMMER 2016

Hyde Park History

VOL. 38  NO. 3 SUMMER 2016

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Chicago, IL
Permit No. 85

Chances R
Memories of a wonderful restaurant

By Linda R. Andrews

Author’s Note:
Before the rise of the shining new twelve-story, mixed-use development at 53rd and Lake Park, there was the urban-renewal complex known as Harper Court: a duplex commercial center along Harper Avenue, between 53rd Street and 52nd Place. The Harper Court complex included a variety of small specialty shops centered around a pedestrian mall, with a sunken, brick-paved plaza and benches well placed for people-watching, enjoying an ice cream cone, or playing an afternoon game of chess. Two restaurants anchored its upper level, and thirty-five years ago, those two restaurants were The Court House, offering formal dining, and the casual, “burger-and-brew” establishment, Chances R.

I began waiting tables at Chances R in September 1975, leaving to pursue graduate study in the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago, then moving to a career as a writer and editor for a Chicago-based management consulting firm. I first wrote this article early in 1981 as a class assignment in creative non-fiction, my Chances R experiences still fresh in my mind. A little over two years later, in September 1983, Chances R would close its doors forever—”the end of an era,” according to its owner.

Anywho, the driver of the Chrysler steps out. He’s tall, built like a linebacker, with short black hair, a close-trimmed beard, and wire-framed glasses that lend a certain gravity to his face. Today he wears a dark brown leather overcoat, one of the half-dozen or so leather coats and jackets he tends to favor. His complexion is just about the color of his coat. His name is Cleveland Holden, Jr., and he happens to be the public on Saturdays and Sundays from 2 until 4pm.

Memories of a wonderful restaurant

and to residents of the South Side. Revisiting this article has brought back many memories. I am happy to share this piece with a present-day audience, many of whom have equally fond memories of the unique Hyde Park establishment that was Chances R.

Anyone who happens to be in the vicinity of 52nd and Harper at about 10 a.m. will notice a distinctive aroma in the air: onions. Sliced onions. Fried onions. Grilled onions. The smell is perceptibly stronger near the intersection of those streets, but it often succeeds in wafting its way as much as half a block from this point, courtesy of the prevailing winds.

Chances are those onions are the best advertising agent a restaurant could have. And though a significant number of Hyde Park’s dining options are concentrated in this area of the neighborhood (the Court House, Mallory’s, Yellow Café, Café Enrico, Gold City Inn, Yogurt Deli, Valois), chances are none of those establishments would care to lay claim to this shameless, yet subtle form of publicity.

Onions! At ten in the morning? You may well find yourself deciding to forgo your usual lunchtime salad. Suddenly a hamburger, smothered in grilled onions, seems tempting at 10 a.m.

At 10:17, a smoke-grey Chrysler Cordoba turns east off Harper Avenue and pulls up at the service entrance of the restaurant responsible for perpetrating the tantalizing aroma. The driver of the Chrysler steps out. He’s tall, built like a linebacker, with short black hair, a close-trimmed beard, and wire-framed glasses that lend a certain gravity to his face. Today he wears a dark brown leather overcoat, one of the half-dozen or so leather coats and jackets he tends to favor. His complexion is just about the color of his coat. His name is Cleveland Holden, Jr., and he happens to...
The Hutton Sisters

By Michal Safar

Odessa and June Cowan were born in 1916 and 1919 respectively. They lived on 40th Street and both attended Hyde Park High School in the 1930’s. Odessa went on to become Ina Ray Hutton a vocalist and leader of an all-woman band, the Melodears, in the late 1940’s. In the 40’s she lead a male trio and from 1951-1956 had her own television show, the Ina Ray Hutton Show, in Los Angeles. June Cowan went on to become June Hutton, a singer and actress with performances on the Frank Sinatra show in the 1950’s as well as appearances as a singer in several movies. Ina Ray Hutton was the subject of a one-woman show in Chicago and a film contact HHC Historical Society in July 2014 while trying to research Ina Ray’s history. We located one mention of her in the 1930 Atchipe, the yearbook of Hyde Park High School. Melissa’s show, Journey of a Bombshell, was performed as part of the Chicago Fringe Festival on September 3, 5, and 6, 2015.

Local Author Writes about the Civil War

By Michal Safar

The Hyde Park Book Club meeting on April 18 featured author Pam Toler, whose recently published book, The Heroines of Mercy Street: the Real Nurses of the Civil War is a finalist for the PBS series, Mercy Street, and tells the true stories of the nurses at Mansion House in Alexandria, Virginia. Pam led an interesting discussion of nursing during the Civil War with lively participation from the group. Pam’s blog, http://www.historyinthemargins.com/ has lots of interesting information on Heroines and other historical topics. The next book club meeting will be May 16 and will have as a discussion topic: The World’s Columbian Exposition: Fact and Fiction. The Hyde Park Book Club meets the third Monday of the month in the lower level meeting room at Treasure Island.

New Members

The Society welcomes the following new members: Andrew Call (new Board member), Sandra Chiarlone, Ahmed Karrar (new Board member), and Paul R. Ingersoll.
A Bolshevik in Hyde Park

Alexander Mikhailovich Krasnoshchekov, whose real name was Avraam Moiseevich Krasnoshchekov, was known in the United States as Stroller Tobinson. Born in Chernobyl, Ukraine on October 10, 1880, as a 17-year-old student in Kiev he joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party; was arrested, imprisoned and exiled to the town of Nikolaievsk near the Black Sea where he met Leon Trotsky. He returned to Ukraine, became a political agitator, and in 1901 was again arrested and released. At about that time he decided to become a Bolshevik (in opposition to Czarist Russia) and went to Berlin to avoid exile to Siberia.

In 1903 he left for the United States, where he joined the Socialist Labor Party and worked as an agitator for the American Federation of Labor. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Chicago where he enrolled in the University of Chicago Law School, graduating in 1912. After graduating, he moved to the east coast where he defended striking workers in the “Bread and Roses Strike” in the textile town of Lawrence, Massachusetts. He left the United States in August, 1917, sailing to Vladivostok in eastern Siberia with his wife and two children. He joined the city council of Nikolaiievsk, a town north of Vladivostok.

Within two weeks he had set up a soviet (council) that rivaled the existing government. Eventually, he became head of state of Russia’s Far Eastern Republic (FER), a state as large as Western Europe, the capital of which was Chita on the Trans-Siberian Railway, now a city of more than 300,000 people.

After Lenin’s death in 1924, Krasnoshchekov’s policies fell afoul of those being established by Stalin. He was arrested in 1925, released, and established himself in the business of agriculture, including cotton and other fiber crops. In 1937 he was arrested again, sentenced to death for espionage on November 27, 1937, and shot the next day. After Stalin’s death in 1956, his image was rehabilitated.


Chances R standing.

Helen believes his restaurant fills a definite need in the Hyde Park community. As far as its characterization as “a black bar,” he says, “A lot of the people that think that about Chances R seem to forget we’re primarily a restaurant.” He pauses, frowning. “I don’t think the customers who come in here regularly think of us as being a black bar, or a black restaurant, per se.”

He concedes that “most outsiders—people who are not familiar with Chances R or with the community—could very easily put a label on us that’s not accurate. But I’d say sixty percent of our business is white.”

Helen should know. Over the years, he and Baldwin have conducted a series of market surveys of the restaurant’s clientele.

One such survey was relatively informal. For a three-week period, each waitress was asked to note on her checks the racial composition of each party she served—with a ‘B’ for ‘black,’ ‘W’ for ‘white,’ ‘O’ for ‘other.’ The checks could be quite closely tabulated by the hour, and some interesting observations emerged, many of them validating Helen’s intuitions about the establishment.

“One hour this place can be entirely black, and the next hour it’s entirely white. Two hours later, and it’s equally mixed. It depends on the time of day and the day of the week.” He notes that people’s dining patterns are different. “You go to a place like that is packed after midnight.” So the grill at Chances R stays open until midnight on weekdays and until 2 a.m. on weekends—later than anyone else’s kitchen closing.

Chances R isn’t just a burger place with beer, or a White Castle with White Russians. The bar has its regulars—devotees of its happy hour (and the hours thereafter, too). The restaurant has its own regulars: the family from Oak Park who stop by for lunch on their way to an afternoon at the Museum of Science and Industry; the divorced father who comes in with his sons for lunch on Sunday, the day he has custody; the CTA bus driver with a penchant for the Reubens (and some particularness who works Monday and Wednesday evenings); the professor of constitutional law who knows to come in for his favorite bowl of chili no sooner than Wednesday, after the week’s batch has been cooking for a couple of days—but who nonetheless asks, “How’s the chili today?”

“We’re unique in Hyde Park because we cater to such a wide spectrum of people,” Holden says. “We get everyone in here, from criminals to bank presidents, from Nobel Prize winners to winos, and people just don’t seem to mind.”

The Hyde Park community is sufficiently small, and the number of restaurants sufficiently few, that the community of restauranteurs all know each other, and each other’s restaurants, quite well. “When a man establishes a new establishment, Harper Square, at 53rd and Harper. Then there was the time the manager of The Original Pancake House at 51st and Lake Park came over one Saturday afternoon, double-billing looking to duck out for a leisurely steak during a full over at his own restaurant. He arrived at Chances R, however, in the middle of a frenetic and inexplicable mid-afternoon rush. (Incidentally, he left a generous tip, along with profuse expressions of ambition for his Chances Rwaitress’s skillful service.) Everybody knows everybody in Hyde Park. So when The Eagle, a small pub, lost its lease last year (reportedly to be transformed into a Giordano’s pizzeria), the entire restaurant community took notice. Holden admits the news took him by surprise. Chances R is perhaps the closest approximation to The Eagle, in terms of its menu and price point, if . . .

Nineteenth Century Picnic Menu

This charming menu for a successful picnic was taken from the November, 1979 issue of the Picnic Menu—HHS Historical Society Newsletter (Vol. 1, No. 4, P. 3), by Leslie Blach.

At our pleasant September 15 outing to the Naper Settlement, the bag lunches were prepared by Thelma Dahlberg, Jean Ervin, Gladys Finn and Chris Leigh.

Thanks, ladies. HPHS members enjoyed reading the explanatory sheet which accompanied each lunch. It explained that every item on the menu—plum jam, sandwiches, deviled eggs, pickles, apple and black walnut cookies, butter cookies with hazelnuts, fresh-picked grapes,

Mystery Quiz:

Question: What endangered species of bird lives in the bell tower of Rockefeller Chapel?
however, he will not be inheriting all the outstanding bills; this is what proving time-consuming about the transferral of the property.

In the meantime, Holden is looking ahead to that transfer. "Here at Chances R, we've not yet reached our potential," he says carefully. Clearly, he has plans of his own. "There's a lot we can do, a lot we are going to do."

He sips coffee (Stewart's, the house brand), then continues. "A food service operation has to be flexible enough to bend with the wind. To respond to the market, you have to know the market. If you can't produce what your customers are looking for, you're out of business."

Then there's Dick Baldwin: gluing down his antiques, making promises he knew he'd have difficulty keeping, and in recent months having no closer contact with his creation than putting his signature to the checks. Holden shrugs, "Business isn't something you can turn on and off like a faucet." And he grins.

Holden once studied classical trumpet with Renold Schilke of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and was also a student of the Jazz Institute of Chicago's Richard Wang. (Expect a lot more jazz and a lot less "easy listening" on the Chances R sound system in the future.) He took courses in concert band and conducting from Dieter Kober, longtime conductor of the Chicago Chamber Orchestra, and served in the U.S. Military Band during his years in the U.S. Army.

"A lot of times, management reminds me of conducting," he says, leaning back in his executive swivel chair and getting a faraway look into his eyes. "Just think of the parts each person plays, the relationship to the whole. It's just like conducting an orchestra."

Everybody's essential, very essential. Yet there's got to be one person behind the whole thing, one person to give directions when necessary, to keep the tempo, steady the tempo.

It's now 2:45. Cleveland Holden, Jr., has finished his coffee. There's a meeting this afternoon of the National Restaurant Association, downtown in the Loop. He finds the assistant manager at one of the Baldwin's storerooms. The expansion took more than six months, promised to clientele based on their input on yet another Baldwin survey, was postponed indefinitely—by Baldwin.

Holden defends Baldwin's decision to expand: "In business, you have to take the chance. It was time to change; without it, the place would have become more run-down."

One retina is that Holden will inherit a larger establishment. When he takes over the operation, for New York City. None—the less, Edison was determined to visit the great Fair, and with his wife and son boarded a train in New York City, arriving in Chicago in early August for a two-week visit. They promptly settled down in a house on Lake Avenue (now Lake Park Avenue), from where he could walk to the Fair in a few minutes.

Although still stinging from having his electrical program snubbed, the latest version of his phonograph, which could play an entire opera on plastic cylinders rotating in a hand cranked phonograph, and his newly designed Kinetoscope—a combination peep show and film projector that presented short films to one person at a time, were sensations.

Dark forelock curving over his handsome face, Edison traveled incognito through the Fairgrounds for several days and evenings. At one time he was spotted eating crackers and jelly while seated alone in the Agriculture Building.

Thomas A. Edison, who lived from 1847 until 1937, was known for his wit. At age 66 he said, "I'm proud of the fact that I never invented anyone to kill."

Then, shortly before he died at age 84, he said that, "I am long on ideas but short on time. I only expect to live to be about 100." PSV